



DC TRANSPORTATION EQUITY NETWORK

**Testimony by Ron Thompson, Policy Officer (Greater Greater Washington)
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Agency Oversight Hearing
February 26, 2021**

Dear Chairperson Cheh and members of the Committee,

The DC Transportation Equity Network (DC TEN) is a coalition of direct service, labor, and advocacy working together collectively to ensure that our transportation system meets the needs of the District's most underserved residents in a safe, affordable, reliable, and sustainable manner. It is our aim to ensure that marginalized communities are seen and heard by those who keep our city moving.

Founded exactly a year ago, DC TEN counts among its members direct service providers So Others Might Eat, Inc. (SOME), House of Ruth, and Community Connections; UNITE HERE Local 25, DC's largest union for hospitality workers; and advocates like District Education Coalition for Change (DECC), Sierra Club of DC, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA).

We envision a transportation system that centers the voice and experience of marginalized constituencies in policymaking in a way which is inclusive, participatory, and dignified.

We envision a transportation system that ensures the safety of every person who uses, operates, and maintains our sidewalks, roads, buses, streetcars, and trains in a way that respects the dignity and rights entitled to each of us.

We envision a transportation system that guarantees the freedom of public transit and active transport users to reach destinations of necessity and leisure regardless of their race, ethnicity, income-status, gender, sex, age, ability, or geographic location.

We envision a transportation system in which public transit service is available across bus, rail, and paratransit services with a frequency and reliability that allows the District's most vulnerable residents to meet their everyday needs with confidence.

We envision a transportation system that recognizes the vital role of public transit and physically active modes of transport in reducing carbon emissions, combating the climate crisis, and injuries and deaths caused by single-occupancy automobiles.

We did not expect to begin our work in earnest against the backdrop of an once-in-a-century pandemic, but the current moment has shown us that the investments we choose to make in transportation and infrastructure, and those we do not, will determine the resiliency of the District during moments of crisis. The last year also provides us with a guide in the policies and investments the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) should make in order to expand opportunities for disadvantaged residents.

In the last year, WMATA has seen Metrorail lose about 90% of its ridership in the last year, while ridership has only dropped around 60%. Crowding on buses, a norm in the before times, became a literal health risk in the before times. What does this tell us about the role of the bus in our city and how should DDOT pivot to respond to these changes?

Similarly, over the first 5 months of the pandemic DC's bike shops saw a boom in the number of people looking for bikes. A study from the Maryland Transportation Institute found that more low-income workers in Chicago relied on the city's bikeshare program. On the other side of these gains are the increase in speeds by drivers on our roadways and collisions, injuries, and fatalities.

How does DDOT respond and what steps should be taken to ensure that those projects, policies, and practices are carried out equitably?

DDOT in the last year has piloted programs to expand access to safe infrastructure for walking, biking, scooting, and other active modes of transportation; built and implemented 2 new bus lanes; and implemented rear-door boarding on the Circulator keeping drivers and riders safe. DDOT has also innovated in the way it does public engagement, exemplified in the varied ways residents can engage with the ongoing MoveDC, the District's long-range multimodal transportation plan.

These initiatives are all steps toward making our city more equitable, sustainable, affordable, and resilient, but they cannot be one off. Projects that achieve these goals also must be defended against parochial interests that put aside the thousands of vulnerable transit riders, pedestrians, and cyclists who choose to use the modes of transportation that get us closer to our established goals around mode shift and greenhouse gas emissions.

What DDOT has exhibited in the last year is an ability to serve our most vulnerable residents with infrastructure and policies that achieve the vision DC TEN has laid out. We thank this committee and the Council for passing the Vision Zero Omnibus Act. We hope to continue working together with DDOT and the Council to continue advancing policies and projects that make our transportation more equitable for the District's most vulnerable.